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FUNERAL SERMON

Occasioned by the Death of

MRS. CORNELIA B. RICHARDSON,

AND OF HER DAUGHTER,

CLARA TYLER RICHARDSON.

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THE MORTAL CHANGE.

A

S E R M O N ,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

MRS. CORNELIA B. RICHARDSON,

AND OF HER DAUGHTER,

CLARA TYLER RICHARDSON,

PREACHED IN

OAK PLACE CHURCH, BOSTON, JANUARY 10, 1864.

BY REV. J. P. BIXBY,

Pastor of the Church.

B O S T O N :

PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN & SON, 42 CONGRESS STREET.

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BOSTON, JANUARY 25, 1864.

REV. J. P. BIXBY :

Dear Brother,—Will you please gratify me, and the numerous relatives and friends of my deceased wife and daughter, in allowing us a copy of your excellent Sermon,—delivered in Oak Place Church, on Sabbath morning, January 10,—for publication. By so doing, you will oblige,

Your Friend and Brother,

WM. FOX RICHARDSON.

BOSTON, FEBRUARY 4, 1864.

BRO. RICHARDSON :

Your Note of January 25, was duly received. In cheerfully granting your request, I inclose a copy of the Sermon referred to, and would dedicate its pages to the memory of the happy lives and Christian death of your departed wife and daughter. I inclose, also, a Letter from Rev. CHARLES SMITH, of Andover, an intimate acquaintance of the deceased, who has kindly fulfilled a request of mine, in sending this "Memorial Tribute" to be printed with the Sermon.

Yours in the best of bonds,

J. P. BIXBY.

S E R M O N .

JOB XIV. 20.

THOU CHANGEST HIS COUNTENANCE, AND SENDEST HIM AWAY.

IN the early part of the past week, as is my custom, I was preparing a discourse for the coming Sabbath morning,—the lesson of the present hour. The plan was completed, and thought had begun to flow from pen to paper, when I was happily constrained, by the arrival of guests, to lay aside my work and mingle in pleasant converse. But in the midst thereof—as a thunder-burst from a clear sky—the echo of a startling death-knell fell upon our ears. Cheeks grew pale, lips quivered, tears fell, and bosoms heaved. I will no farther attempt a description of the indescribable pang.

As afterward, in thought, I returned to my discourse, and stood again in this place, I saw your eyes no longer turned to this pulpit, but toward yonder pew. To you, my subject had become empty; for that empty sitting on which you gazed, excited your deepest and most pathetic emotions. I had no election; for, to gain your attention, I must echo the silent but potent lessons

of that vacant seat. Methinks your minds have been, and still are employed with various inquiries ; such as, " Why was this one taken ? " Life with her was but fairly under way ; her cheek bore the hue of youth, and her step had all the elasticity and firmness of meridian life. She had but just commenced to quaff the full goblet of earthly enjoyment. She was a wife and mother, and her home was now the established centre toward which relatives and friends were attracted. A recent Thanksgiving banquet gathered kindred of three generations around her festal board ; she was the joy of all.

Why was *she* taken from children, who found in her embrace a warmer pressure than they can find elsewhere on earth ? Did they not need her hourly advice ? Did they not need her care, to watch over them in health, and her vigils, to attend them in sickness ? Reason dictates, that they needed a mother's control, which, like gold, the most precious metal, is both firm and impressible. They needed that tenderest, and at the same time most authoritative persuasive to holy living—a Christian mother's example. They needed her sympathy also. There are various cisterns of sympathy ; but, to the child, there is only one fountain ; and that is in the mother's heart.

Why is she to lead these children to the " Maternal Meeting " no more ? But three moons have waxed and waned, since she was at the quarterly gathering of this ' meeting,' cheerily encouraging

her son to look forward with anticipation to the first Wednesday of the new year, when she hoped to enjoy again with him a similar gathering. The Wednesday came; but it was the day before her funeral. The gathering was called; but mothers, children and pastor could say but little, while they wept much. Why was not one taken who had no children, and hence could leave no orphans.

But again, Why has the raven of death been permitted to perch a second time on the cross of this husband, and make him a second time companionless? He learned, long ago, what it is to stoop beneath such a burden. Why did not this calamitous providence fall upon some of us, who merited it equally, and to human appearance needed it more? Why is a whole community also made to weep, while so many others, who move in a much narrower sphere, might have been taken? To these, and many more inquiries which we might mention, there is no response. We can only say, "O Lord, thou knowest!"

But here we are startled with new tidings. Alas, is it true that another seat at the same table, in the same pew, and in our much loved Sabbath school, has been made vacant! If the Angel of Death has entered the household, and plucked the most precious specimen of ripening fruit, will he not be satisfied without snatching an unfolding bud? No, he is commissioned to place in the Saviour's right hand the early fruit, and in his left the early flower; the daughter is also taken. In

life, the mother and child were not separated ; and in death they are not divided. To-day, we trust, they meet in the upper temple, and as we think of their recent meeting with us, we feel that

“ Just before, the shining shore.
We can almost discover.”

Long might we dwell in detail upon the sweet remembrances of the dear ones departed. But, my hearers, I perceive a yearning in your hearts ; it is visible upon your countenances. That yearning is, that I overstep the bounds of prevalent custom, and follow the good old Puritan method of preaching a funeral sermon. I feel that I shall be pardoned if, to an extent, I seek to fulfill this desire of your hearts, and thus at the same time follow my own promptings. The providence of God having taken away my former text and former discourse, the Spirit of God, I trust, has given me a new text and a new sermon ; and while we speak and listen, may that good Spirit give to us all new impressions, and to some of us new hearts. “ Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away.” This change is properly denominated, ‘ The Mortal Change.’

Our first topic shall be, an observation of some of the characteristics of this change. First, it is an affecting change ; a change of the countenance. Nothing in the human structure is equally prominent and expressive with the human face. It is

the most beautiful object in nature, and can really express all the varied types of feeling attributed to the passion-flower. The most difficult work for the painter is to faithfully portray the human countenance,—that sensitive canvas on which, in turn, the inward spirit exhibits the greatest joy and the deepest grief ; the sternest and the tenderest passions ; the most winning and the most forbidding emotions. It is trite to speak of the eyes, as the windows of the soul ; but still how true it is, that through these transparent veils, the immortal spirit looks out upon the external world. The eye is also the truthful interpreter of the mental state. In joy, the lustrous eye sparkles forth the diamond brightness of the heart. In grief, that same eye weeps forth the inward gushings of the soul. Pleasure smooths the forehead ; but sorrow furrows it and hangs a burden upon the brow. The face of nature, subject to all the changes of the seasons, is not more changeful than the countenance. It glows in ecstasy, is pallid in fear, is white as marble in horror, and in sickness is sallow.

But none of these changes can be mistaken for ‘The Mortal Change ;’ this has its peculiar color and its own characteristics. The countenances of the mother and daughter, for which we look in vain this morning, underwent various changes, but none like the final change. How often they have sat together in these deserted seats, their countenances wearing the livery of perfect health, and

unbroken composure. Well do we remember, also, their changed countenances a few Sabbaths since, when, in the midst of service, it became known to them that the son and brother had been sent home, under a sudden stroke of illness. How hurriedly they adjusted their apparel, and with what nervous steps they left the house of God, to go to the home of sickness. Their countenances bore the obvious marks of anxious solicitude. But, how different their aspect from ever before, when, with their feet at the entrance of the tomb, and in opened coffins resting on the cold snow, with their faces turned upward towards the blue arch whither their souls had flown, kindred impressed a farewell kiss on those marble brows, and we all gave a farewell look to those changed countenances. How affecting this change that God brings upon the human visage at death. In life, nothing was so welcome to husband and friend as those countenances now changed, and shrouded in the darkness of the tomb.

Again, secondly. 'The Mortal Change' is characterized by the variety of means by which it is brought to pass. Casualties of every kind, and sicknesses of every type and degree, are competent to induce it. The proverb is even less trite than true, that "in the midst of life we are in death." It was but the other morning that a healthful man passed along these streets to his labor. He was the overseer of a house that was being erected. He attempted nothing new, or apparently dangerous, when he ascended the ladder to the third story

of the building, to supervise the work. A single misstep precipitated him to the ground, and when taken up, how changed his countenance ; how soon the carpenter became a corpse.

Recently, a letter was left at a neighboring door. It was cordially received, for it brought glad tidings from a son in the army. Through all the battles of a two years' campaign, his countenance had remained unchanged, though he had been surrounded with wasting disease and violent death. The campaign of the present year having closed, with active hands and a merry heart he was demolishing the deserted buildings of rebels, and out of them was erecting cheerful winter-quarters. He was happy; and on the receipt of his letter, his kindred were happy ; for hope anticipated the revolving of a few months, when the son and brother would return to the paternal threshold. A few days after this letter was brought, another carrier stood at the same door. It was a sexton, and he had brought a casket. In a moment, the stroke of a detached portion of the tottering building had smitten the young soldier to the earth, and he was taken up with a changed countenance.

Of all the causes of death, however, against which man can make no provision, none is more prominent than that dreadful scourge, diphtheria, which has made vacant the seat of this mother and daughter. Whence cometh this direful disease? Properly speaking, it is not contagious. Is its home in the air ; does it lurk in our diet ; or is it entrenched in

certain constitutions, especially in those by nature the firmest and strongest? There is no definite reply. Science has not yet been keen enough of sight, nor minute enough in search, to detect its abode. All we know is, it has come to this church and to this mourning circle. It came to the departed, took its wonted place in the channel through which the vital air feeds the fires of life, and there, despite all medical attempts at dislodgment, it remained, till it closed the avenue of life, and extinguished the vital flame.

A third characteristic of 'The Mortal Change' is, that it is wrought under the most varied circumstances. Events are often pleasant or unpleasant, consoling or afflictive, as much from the circumstances under which they occur, as from their intrinsic nature. Though the friend nearest and dearest bear the paleness of 'The Mortal Change,' yet, if the brow wear a wreath of evergreen, the emblem of the eternal coronet with which the soul is crowned,—if the hand hold a rose, the symbol of that upper Eden where the soul abideth ever,—our grief is diminished, though it be but partially allayed. In like manner, death may have alleviations in consoling surroundings; and for want of these, mourning may be doubly mournful.

You recall the announcement of a recent death in the public prints. Father and son were together at a lecture, the father occupying a seat in the rear of his son, near the entrance of the hall. In the midst of the exercises, the father died. The corse

was at once removed, without disturbance, to an adjoining room; but no one knew the changed countenance. The terrible news of the father's death at length was made known to the son; and what was the more saddening, the precious relics which he would have tenderly escorted home, had been removed to the public dead-house. Such circumstances add a bitterness to sorrow.

During the last season, a 'mother in Israel,' of more than fourscore years, left her country home to make her last social visit to her children. It was August when she arrived in this city, and she found that her child had fled from these sultry streets to the country. Here the mother sickened and died. She was reluctant to depart this life. Not because her heavenly home was not bright and fair, but because she longed to die amid the cool breezes, that came down from the Green Mountains. She wanted to die amid the forests and the fields, the flowers and the fruits of her dear old home. Her only unanswered prayer was, "Oh, take me home to die." Providence, ever wisest, ordered it otherwise.

How different from this, the death of the mother and daughter who have passed away from *us*. They were at home; 'they breathed their lives out sweetly there.' How consoling this circumstance, and all that necessarily attends it. Still, it is natural for friends to blame themselves, after Death has conquered, that they did so little for the departed. "If we had only realized that they were wrestling

with a giant; if we had not shut our eyes to the terrible prophecy which we now see to have been clearly foretold; if we had called the physician earlier; if we had sought the best medical aid at the outset; if we had sent at once for the mother, or sister, who was best acquainted with the constitution of the departed; oh, if we had done otherwise than we did, the circumstances at least would anoint our bleeding hearts with the oil of consolation. But as it is, we hourly convict ourselves of indiscretion, if not of thoughtlessness."

Take another view. The proverb says, 'The Lord tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb.' And does he not do this especially, when the cold blast of death is tempered by the genial kindness, attention and devotion of husband, father and friend. This household should be consoled by the thought, that the mother and daughter died upon their own couches, at their own loved home, and were buried by the hands of sympathizing friends.

But our text presents a second topic of thought: "Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away." This latter thought, "Sendest him away," suggests two inquiries, to wit: "From what are the departed sent away," and "To what are they sent."

First, "From what are the departed sent away?" They are sent away from all the concernments of this life; from all the associations of friends; from feast days and leisure days and labor days. They are sent away from the church of God, the house

of worship, the place of prayer, the meeting of mothers, and the meeting of children. The mother is sent away from that high circuit of pleasures so properly symbolized by the marriage ring. That simple band of gold most fitly expressed that golden round of duties and enjoyments peculiar to wife and mother. But, on the other hand, the departed are sent away from multiplied temptations and conflicts. Life, especially the Christian life, is a struggle. Within, is a corrupt fountain, and into all the streams that flow therefrom, should be cast the balsam of a Saviour's righteousness. That we may say in all things and at all times,—

“ Oh, may that will which gave me breath,
And an immortal soul,
In joy and grief, in life and death,
My every wish control,”—

requires watching and wrestling. In this life, also, we are in the midst of evil tendencies which strive to bear us along in their current; these must be resisted. In this world, likewise, we have a great enemy to encounter, and the struggle with him is often severe. From all these conflicts, the departed are sent away.

But are these departed ones really sent away from us? When the van of the children of Israel, on their march to Canaan, stood upon the farther side of the Red Sea, they were sent away from bondage and task-masters and foes, but were they sent away from their brethren in the rear, who had

not yet gone down the bank of the sea? Not at all. It was absolutely certain, that the rear would soon stand upon the same shore with those who had passed over before them. Thus it is with the church of God, that is on its march to the promised land. Because those in the van now stand on the glorified shore, is no proof that they are sent away from us; for we are marching in their footsteps, and shall soon stand by their sides.

Nor shall we and our Christian friends be separated in the resurrection. When the coarse clay of the valley falls upon the cold clay of our friends, we should beware lest we be deceived by appearances. Apparently, earth has conquered. But nay; that sacred dust shall yet arise, and stand upon those coarse clods a triumphant conqueror. Had the disciples been as thoroughly taught as we, they would not have gone toward Emmaus downcast and sad. It was meet that Jesus die and be buried, for otherwise he could not have the triumph of a resurrection. And thus it is with our departed friends, and will be with us, that we may not be separated on the glorious morning of the resurrection. "We are sown a natural body; we are raised a spiritual body."

Secondly. To what, we inquire in the last place, are the departed sent? Oh, sweet expression, "To die is gain;" not, *shall be* gain merely, but *is* gain. The departed are sent away to a happy land. No frosts and no snows fall upon that "better country." The river of life, like the Amazon, ever flows be-

neath a warm equator, and in the midst of perpetual summer. The tree of life is clad in perennial verdure, and brings forth her fruit every month. There, skies never lower and are never veiled. There is no night there, for there is no need of repose; steps never tire, heads never droop, eyes are never heavy. There is no more sorrow there; the valley of Baca is all on this side the flood. The New Jerusalem is on a mountain; as one has said,—

“There, on a green and flowery mount,
Our weary souls shall sit;
And with transporting joys recount
The labors of our feet.”

The Christian, sent away from this world, is also sent to the best of society. Many have been gathered, from the North and the South, the East and the West, and are seated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But, perhaps, at this point, inquiry made long ago, arises also in your minds. “Do you think,” said one, “you will know me in heaven?” “Shall I know you?” replied the other. “Why, I have always known you on earth, and do you think I shall know less in heaven?” The answer is satisfactory; “we shall know each other there.” In heaven it is a daily saying, ‘Here Lord, I am, and the children that thou hast given me.’

The dying Christian is also sent away to an immortal crown. Earthly crowns, for the most part,

are lined with thorns ; but not so is it with the immortal crown. The head that wore the helmet of salvation on earth, wears a crown in heaven ; a crown which is down within, and diamonds without. Oh, glorious sight ! a company which no man can number ; all of them with crowns on their heads, and not one of them with sin in the heart. Content, then, let us be, if we can feel that our departed friends inherit on high all good and all grace. Those who wear crowns before the Lamb, also carry conquering palms, the signals of their victory. Truly, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Sent away to heaven ; to heaven ! Would that I could partially, if no more, answer your question, " What is heaven ? " How would every Christian exclaim, " I shall be satisfied when I enter there." Yea, more ; each would say, " I am now ready to depart, for there is a crown of glory laid up for me in heaven."

But, I imagine one to be present, who can tell us what heaven is. That vacant seat, methinks, is once more filled ; there sits the sainted mother, leaning with one hand upon her golden harp, and pointing upward with the other, as she sings :

That is a land like Eden fair,
But more than Eden blest ;
The wicked cease from troubling there,
The weary are at rest.

That is a land of calmest shore,
 Where ceaseless summers smile,
 And winds, like angel whispers, pour
 Across that shining isle.

That is a land of purest mirth,
 Where healing waters glide,
 And there the wearied child of earth,
 Untroubled may abide.

That is a land where star-like shine,
 The pearls of Christ's renown,
 And gems, long buried in the mine,
 Are jewels in his crown.

That is a land like Eden fair,
 But more than Eden blest;
 Oh for a wing to waft you there,
 To fly and be at rest.

But oh, thou sainted mother, ere thou seek again
 the Saviour's bosom, sing to us the answer to one
 other question. Why, oh why was the child taken?
 Do we not hear this reponse? .

God looked among his cherub band,
 And one was wanting there,
 To swell along the holy land,
 The hymns of praise and prayer.

One genial soul, whose eye had been
 Directed to the sky,
 Untempered in a world of sin,
 He watched with loving eye.

She was too promising a flower,
 To bloom upon this earth,
 And God did give her angel-power,
 A bright celestial birth.

The world was all too bleak and cold
To yield her quiet rest ;
God brought her to his shepherd fold,
And laid her on his breast.

There, husband, in thy Saviour's arms
Forever undefiled,
Amid the holy cherub band,
Is thy beloved child.

Rev. CHARLES SMITH, the former pastor of the deceased, has furnished, by request, the following

“MEMORIAL TRIBUTE.”

THE sudden death of Mrs. RICHARDSON, followed so soon by that of her eldest daughter, was a most sad event to her friends; and not, as yet, has the mind become so habituated to the thought of her departure, as to recognize it at once as a conceded fact. We were accustomed to think of her as destined, by her vigorous constitution, excellent health, and favorable worldly circumstances, to a long life in the world.

But God's “thoughts are not as our thoughts.” She has been taken from us, and we may no more behold her pleasant face, or receive her hearty welcome, in the home, made beautiful and attractive by her presence and goodness. Our Heavenly Father, in his infinite wisdom and love, has seen fit to remove her from the companionship and fond endearments of devoted friends, to the fellowship of the saints. And though she enjoyed life in an unusual degree, and had very much in her affectionate family, friends, and circumstances, to make life desirable, we doubt not that the change is, to her, great gain.

Nor has she lived on the earth in vain. Her deeds of kindness are her memorial. Her prayers are the rich legacy she has left to those she loved. Her memory will be always choice and fragrant to those who knew her best. Her example will be a stimulus to her friends to just and charitable living.

Naturally of a retiring disposition, surrounded with a choice circle of family friends, domestic in her tastes, Mrs. Richardson's full worth of character, her true value as a woman, was known to comparatively few ; but those few to whom she was best known, admired and appreciated her strength of character, sweetness of disposition, honesty of heart, fidelity and friendship, frankness, cordiality, generosity, patience in trial, and faith in the resurrection of Christ. Of an open nature, never indulging suspicions, her friends had no fear of finding her tone and face changed towards them, by a change in their circumstances. She both trusted and inspired trust. She never failed those who confided in her. Though her life was comparatively free from severe trials, still she was not wanting in that sacred witness of the love of her Lord, which affliction furnishes.

Some years since, her eldest born, a lad of much promise, was suddenly removed by death. This was a grievous affliction to her, but she patiently bore it, "as seeing Him who is invisible." While her heart was bleeding, her faith remained firm. Through this grief, we believe, she reached a richer Christian experience, and became the better prepared to follow her darling boy into the presence of her Saviour. There is a chastened joy in the remembrance that the daughter, whose remains were borne with those of the mother to the tomb, expressed pleasure in prospect of dying and going to be with her departed and much loved mother. We trust they are united, where all tears are wiped away.

To the deeply bereaved husband and father the sympathy of friends is freely tendered ; but nothing less than the faith of the Christian, and the support of "the Comforter," can enable him to bear calmly such a loss. May he fully experience the blessedness of those who mourn.

